



# BIOGRAPHY BORN: MAY 26, 1926 DIED: SEPTEMBER 28, 1991

## MILES DAVIS: 2015

Miles Davis – legendary trumpeter and bandleader, explorer of unknown musical paths and enduring icon of hip – would be celebrating his 90th birthday next year had he not departed in 1991. Yet by all measure his sound and stature is more alive than ever. In the upcoming year, the news of a major musical collection covering twenty years of historic live performances, and a full-length motion picture have already begun to generate headlines and other major media attention. A number of other projects are afoot as well, promising to add more interest to and raise his legacy higher than ever.

Immediately out of the gate is the release of *Miles Davis at Newport 1955-1975: The Bootleg Series Vol. 4*, a 4-CD collection featuring primarily never before released performances from a twenty-year period when the trumpeter delivered groundbreaking music every time he hit the stage at an event under the Newport banner. The set includes Davis performing in the company of his most influential groups, from his Kind of Blue sextet (John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Cannonball Adderley, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb); his classic 1960s quintet (Wayne Shorter, Herbie

Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams) and his two-guitar fusion ensemble of the mid-'70s (Pete Cosey, Reggie Lucas, Dave Liebman, Michael Henderson, Al Foster, Mtume). Produced by Columbia/Legacy Recordings, a division of Sony Music Entertainment, the historic release arrives on Friday, July 17 – 60 years to the date since Davis' premiere performance at Newport in 1955 when he performed "Round Midnight" in the company of an all-star band (Thelonious Monk, Gerry Mulligan, Zoot Sims, Percy Heath, Connie Kay), inspiring Columbia Records to sign the trumpeter and initiating a thirty-year run of classic recordings.

In addition, this year's **Newport Jazz Festival** pays tribute to Miles's fruitful relationship with the annual event, and his enduring friendship with jazz impresario George Wein, whom he first met in 1952 when they were both beginning to make names for themselves. Many groups performing on the stages at Fort McAdams will play tunes written by or associated with Miles, and Grammy Award®-winning author and music historian **Ashley Kahn** will curate two seminars each day on the renowned trumpeter at the festival's new Storyville stage.

***Miles Ahead*** is the title of the major motion picture co-written and co-produced by actor/director **Don Cheadle**, along with Miles's nephew **Vince Wilburn, Jr.** and his son **Erin Davis**. The film tells the story of a few dangerous days in the life of music icon Miles Davis (played by Cheadle), the virtuoso, fighter and genius, as he bursts out of his silent period and conspires with a *Rolling Stone* writer (Ewan McGregor) to steal back his music. The film has been funded in part through crowd funding on social media, and promises to be popular, introducing the trumpeter and his legacy to another generation. The score for the film—featuring both recreations of Miles's classic performances, as well as original music channeling contemporary styles and sounds—has already achieved critical praise as Cheadle recruited keyboardist, composer and producer **Robert Glasper** to compose additional music for the film, along with the legendary Herbie Hancock as consultant. Other well-known musicians and Miles's alumni participating in the film include **Wayne Shorter, Esperanza Spalding, Gary Clark, Jr., Antonio Sanchez**, while Glasper is also working on a remix project of the original soundtrack music.

***Miles Ahead*** doesn't have a release date yet, but it will surely grab headlines and will be greeted by crowds of moviegoers hungry to know how this exciting and long-awaited labor of love turns out—and by all indications, they won't be disappointed.

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Over six full decades, from his arrival on the national scene in 1945 until his death in 1991, Miles Davis made music that grew from an uncanny talent to hear the future and a headstrong desire to play it. From his beginnings in the circle of modern jazz, he came to intuit new worlds of sound and challenge. While the vast majority of musicians – jazz, rock, R&B, otherwise – find the experimental charge and imperviousness of youth eventually running down, Miles forever forged ahead, trusting and following instinct until the end.

In doing so, Miles became the standard bearer for successive generations of musicians, shaped the course of modern improvisational music more than a half-dozen times. This biography attempts to explain those paradigm-shifts one after another, through his recordings and major life changes.

The factors leading to that process are now the foundation of the Miles Davis legend: the dentist's son born in 1926 to middle-class comfort in East St Louis. The fresh acolyte learning trumpet in the fertile, blues-drenched music scene of his hometown. The sensitive soul forging a seething streetwise exterior that later earned him the title, Prince Of Darkness. The determined teenager convincing his parents to send him to New York's famed Juilliard School of Music in 1944, a ploy allowing him to locate and join the band of his idol, bebop pioneer Charlie Parker.

It wasn't long before the headstrong young arrival grew from sideman to leading his own projects and bands of renown, from the restrained, classical underpinning of the famous "Birth of the Cool" group (Miles's first foray with arranger Gil Evans), to the blues-infused hardbop anthem "Walkin'", to his first famous quintet (Coltrane, Chambers, Red Garland, Philly Joe Jones) with whom his recordings on muted trumpet helped him develop a signature sound that broke through to mainstream recognition. His subsequent jump from recording with independent labels (Prestige, Blue Note) to Columbia Records, then the Tiffany of record companies, propelled his career further from a limited jazz audience and a series of late '50s albums (*Miles Ahead*, *Porgy & Bess*, *Miles Ahead*, *Kind of Blue* and *Sketches of Spain*) secured his widespread popularity.

Miles's group shifted and morphed through the early '60s until he settled for a four-year run with his classic quintet, a lineup that is still hailed today as one of the greatest and most influential jazz groups of all time. Their albums together—from *Miles Smiles*, *ESP* and *Nefertiti*,

to *Miles In The Sky*, and *Filles de Kilimanjaro*—traced a pattern of unparalleled growth and innovation.

Had Miles stopped his progress at that point, he'd still be hailed as one of the greatest pioneers in jazz, but his creative momentum from the end of the '60s into the '70s would not let up. He was listening to the world around him—the amplified explosion of rock bands and the new, heavy-on-the-one funk of James Brown and Sly & The Family Stone. From the ambient hush of *In A Silent Way*, to the strange and unsettling – yet wildly popular *Bitches Brew*, he achieved another shift in musical paradigm and a personal career breakthrough.

*Bitches Brew* was controversial, a best-seller and attracted another, younger generation into the Miles fold. Thousands whose musical taste respected no categorical walls flocked to hear Miles, and a slew of fusion bands were soon spawned, led by his former sidemen: Weather Report, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return To Forever. The studio albums that defined Miles's kaleidoscopic sound in the '70s included a series of (mostly) double albums, from ...*Brew* to 1971's *Live-Evil*, '72's *On The Corner* and '75's *Get Up With It*. The covers listed populous line-ups that reached up to 11 musicians, adding new names to an ever-widening circle of on-call talent.

By the end of 1975, Miles was tired – and sick. A period of seclusion ensued, full years to deal with personal demons and health issues, bouncing between bouts of self-abuse and boredom. It was the longest time Miles had been off the public radar – only amplifying the appetite for his return.

When Miles's reappeared in 1981, expectation had reached fever pitch. A final series of albums for Columbia reflected his continuing fascination with funk of the day (Rose Royce, Cameo, Chaka Khan and later, Prince), and the sounds of synthesizer and drum machines (Great Miles Shift Number 8). *The Man With A Horn*, *We Want Miles* and *Decoy* found him still working with Teo Macero and still surrounding himself with young talent, including bassist Darryl Jones (Rolling Stones). In 1985, his album *You're Under Arrest* — with unexpected covers of recent pop charters (Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time") — brought the long Davis-Columbia association to a close. He embarked on a new relationship with Warner Bros. Records and producer Tommy LiPuma, scoring successes with *Tutu* (written in a large part by his bassist Marcus Miller), *Music from Siesta* (also with

Miller), *Amandla* (featuring a new breed of soloists, including alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett, tenor saxophonist Rick Margitza, guitarist Jean-Paul Bourelly, keyboardist Joey DeFrancesco, and others) and *Doo-Bop* (his collaboration with hip hop producer Easy Moe Bee.)

Those titles proved Miles's farewell, still pushing forward, still exploring new musical territory. Throughout his career, he had always resisted looking back, avoiding nostalgia and loathing leftovers. "It's more like warmed-over turkey," the eternal modernist described the music of *Kind of Blue* twenty-five years after recording it. Ironically, in 1991, only weeks after performing a career-overview concert in Paris that featured old friends and collaborators from as early as the '40s, he died from a brain aneurysm.

Like his music, Miles always spoke with an economy of expression. And for Miles, it had to be fresh, or forget it. "I don't want you to like me because of *Kind of Blue*," he insisted. "Like me for what we're doing now."